



Senator Feinstein Renews Call for FAA to Address Agency's Serious Air Traffic Controller Staffing Shortages

September 26, 2006

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today renewed her call for the Federal Aviation Association (FAA) to address the agency's serious air traffic controller staffing shortages. In a letter to FAA Administrator Marion C. Blakey, Senator Feinstein asked the agency to provide a detailed plan for relieving a staffing shortfall of an estimated 11,000 to 12,000 air traffic controllers when the employees become eligible for retirement between now and 2011.

“I believe very strongly that air traffic controllers hold the key to keeping Americans safe while traveling our nation's skies,” Senator Feinstein wrote. “Based upon current staffing statistics and known retirements, I believe that the FAA has seriously underestimated the staffing situation surrounding our nation's air traffic controllers. It is not clear to me that the FAA has a workable plan in place to replace those controllers.”

Pasted below is the text of the letter from Senator Feinstein to FAA Administrator Blakey:

September 25, 2006

The Honorable Marion C. Blakey
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 1010
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Blakey:

In response to the letter I sent you on September 11, 2006, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) spokesman was quoted in the attached *Bay City News Wire* report “that the agency staffs the proper number traffic controllers to safely and efficiently handle all of its air traffic. The agency also has a comprehensive hiring plan in place to meet future needs.” Based upon current staffing statistics and known retirements, I believe that the FAA has seriously underestimated the staffing situation surrounding our nation's air traffic controllers.

According to both the FAA and the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, there will be between 11,000 and 12,000 air traffic controllers eligible for retirement between now and the end of 2011. It is not clear to me that the FAA has a workable plan in place to replace those controllers.

A good example of staffing shortages is the Northern California TRACON in Sacramento. Northern California TRACON is authorized to employ 196 controllers. However, at the beginning of September 2006 there were only 154 controllers working at this facility. Additionally, this facility will be hit hard by retirement within the next sixteen months. Thirty-five controllers are currently eligible for retirement, another 77 will join them at the end of 2007, and 30 will be forced to retire in June of that same year.

In light of these startling statistics, I would like specific answers to the following questions to better understand the FAA's plans for solving the air traffic controller staffing problem:

- How many people does the FAA plan to hire to replace those controllers who will be eligible for retirement by 2011?
- How many people have entered into the Air Traffic Controller Academy this year?
- How many people have graduated from the Air Controller Academy this year?
- Of those individuals who have graduated from the Academy this year, how many Trainees do you plan on sending to the California's TRACON facilities?
- What practices do you currently have or are you planning to implement to retain employees?

I believe very strongly that air traffic controllers hold the key to keeping Americans safe while traveling our nation's skies. Thank you for your attention and I look forward to your specific answers to my questions.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

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